Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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Log Number: 07-05-21
Week of January 29, 2007

PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS ON AG POLICY COMING TO SASKATCHEWAN

Anybody interested in giving their views on future agricultural policy will get their chance at public consultations being held in the province in early February.

The "next generation" consultations are being held across the country, and all interested stakeholders are being invited to provide their input during these important meetings.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada is handling the sessions in co-operation with provincial governments. The stated objective is to work with stakeholders to develop the next generation of agriculture and agri-food policy.

The current Agricultural Policy Framework was developed by the two levels of government in 2003. Its current provisions are set to expire in 2008.

In Saskatchewan, public consultations will take place on February 5 in Swift Current, February 6 in Regina, February 7 in Yorkton, and February 9 in North Battleford. Those interested in attending any of these sessions are asked to pre-register. Registration can be done online at www.agr.gc.ca/nextgen.

Paul Johnson with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF) is a member of the federal-provincial committee that designed the consultative process. He noted, "This is a national process, and Saskatchewan is only one part it. It's important that Saskatchewan stakeholders get out and voice their opinions. This process is an excellent forum for providing input into the future of agricultural policy in this country."

Johnson urges all interested parties to give some thought as to how agriculture policy should look, specifically from a Saskatchewan point of view. He says that the results of these consultations, once combined with results from similar sessions across Canada, will become part of future federal-provincial negotiations on the new Agricultural Policy Framework.

"Take an active interest, because it will have an impact," Johnson said. "I urge stakeholders to register early—as the sessions will be full—and to take the time to learn as much as they can about the nature of the Agricultural Policy Framework."

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In addition to the consultative meetings, the public can submit comments to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada using the www.agr.gc.ca/nextgen website, or by mail to 930 Carling Avenue, Room 833, Ottawa, Ontario; K1A 0C7. Also available on the website are background policy documents and other information that may be of interest. Hard copies of this material can be requested by calling 1-800-622-6232.

Following the public consultations, governments will organize invitation-only working sessions with key agricultural groups to focus on analyzing the input received as a way of guiding future policy development.

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E. COLI VACCINE IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENT FOR BEEF INDUSTRY

A ground-breaking vaccine for cattle, brought to commercial viability by the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization (VIDO) in Saskatoon, is a major addition to the Canadian beef industry's quality and safety arsenal.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has just approved the distribution of the vaccine to Canadian veterinarians. Based on a discovery by University of British Columbia researcher Brett Finlay, the science behind the vaccine was refined by a VIDO research team headed up by Associate Director of Research Andrew Potter.

The new vaccine greatly reduces the amount of *E. coli* O157:H7 bacteria shed by cattle into their environment that works by stopping the attachment of the *E. coli* bacteria to the intestinal surface in cattle.

VIDO Director and CEO Lorne Babiuk says this makes Canada the first country in the world to access a vaccine for the *E. coli* O157:H7 strain. This is also the first time animals will be vaccinated to protect human health.

"Our producers have always prided themselves on the safety and quality of Canadian beef," said Babiuk. "This will be one more way we can maintain that standard."

The new vaccine will be commercially distributed through Bioniche Life Sciences Inc., an Ontario-based company. Babiuk says some of it will be marketed within six months, and it is expected to be widely available to veterinarians within 18 months.

Babiuk notes that "urbanization is putting increasing pressure on the environment for cattle producers, and if we can reduce the threat of contamination, this will support the safety of our food supply."

Babiuk says he expects that the *E. coli* vaccine will likely not be widely used by individual producers for their herds; however, he can see a day when it is used in feedlots.

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"The issue depends on how processors view this," said Babiuk. "At some point, the large buyers of beef may require certificates of vaccination as a part of their standards."

The success of this development is encouraging VIDO to research vaccines for other closely related bacteria that produce similar toxins, include Salmonella and other *E. coli* strains.

The new vaccine's development was supported by numerous investors, including the Canada Beef Industry Development Fund and the Alberta Livestock Industry Development Fund.

Babiuk is pleased to see another world first from VIDO, which is based at the University of Saskatchewan.

"It takes great minds and vision," he said. "Imagination is great when combined with scientific ability."

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GOOD SOIL MANAGEMENT PAYS OFF IN SPADES FOR FARMERS

The 19th annual meeting and conference of the Saskatchewan Soil Conservation Association (SSCA) will take place February 14 and 15 at the Saskatoon Inn in Saskatoon.

The SSCA is a non-profit producer organization. Its vision is to promote conservation production systems that improve the land and the environment for future generations. According to Juanita Polegi, the Assistant Manager of the SSCA, both the association and its annual conferences have come a long way since their early beginnings in terms of how they work at achieving that vision.

"In the old days, conferences used to focus on how producers could practice basic soil conservation. We used to teach things like direct seeding and promote its benefits," Polegi said.

"Now, many of these practices are quite common, their benefits are well-known, and we've advanced a ways beyond that initial stage. Now, we're helping producers to improve their competitive advantage, discussing the latest agronomic information that will enhance their ability to look after the environment and at the same time enhance their production. The two very much go hand-in-hand, and we try to help producers maximize both," she added.

This year's conference, entitled "Farming Moving Forward," will feature sessions on a number of important topics, including: new crop technologies, beneficial soil microbes, grass and cows, the environment and reducing agricultural greenhouse gas emissions, alternative uses for prairie crops, improving pesticide efficiencies, and new and emerging issues.

"We've chosen a different format for this year's conference, but our lineup of speakers is going to be as solid as ever," said Polegi, noting that 32 different presenters will be addressing delegates over the course of the two-day event.

"We've got a mix of researchers and farmers. The researchers are going to be relating their latest findings on a variety of topics, and farmers are going to be commenting on how they employ that research in their own farm situations."

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Another popular session will be a "Youth Vision for Agriculture" presentation by two schools participating in the Agriculture in the Classroom (AITC) initiative. According to Polegi, AITC put together a hypothetical farm, then asked the schools to propose short-term and long-term plans for the viability of the operation.

"We always find it really interesting to see how the kids take the information that they've got, their own experiences, their experiences with their parents, the research that they do, and the kinds of solutions that they come up with for the hypothetical farm," she said. "That's always a crowd pleaser."

In addition, the conference will feature two bear-pit sessions: one on crop management and one on cattle and grain. An evening banquet will include the presentations of the SSCA Award of Merit to a deserving individual and the Farm Family Award for excellence in conservation.

Polegi says the conference is one that has appeal to both grain farmers and livestock producers, and many of the sessions overlap the two sectors. "People who attend are going to find out a lot about their soil resource and how to manage it well, be it through proper grazing techniques or proper crop production," she said.

"As producers manage the soil resource better, it becomes more productive, and it just becomes a continuous cycle. Take care of soil and the soil will take care of you."

Anyone interested in attending the conference can register by calling the SSCA toll-free at 1-800-213-4287. Registration is $95.40 per person for SSCA members before February 2, and $116.60 after. For non-members, the fees are $116.60 per person before February 2, and $137.80 after. GST has been included in all fees quoted.

More information on the conference can be found on the SSCA website at www.ssca.ca.

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U OF S "MARKET PROSPECTS" PROGRAM CONTINUES IN 2007

For over 20 years, the University of Saskatchewan's Market Prospects program, shown on CTV's *Farmgate*, has been helping producers make critical decisions in their farming operations.

The series will be going strong again throughout 2007, with its annual market analysis and forecasts for livestock, grains, oilseeds and specialty crops featured every Saturday through to April 21.

Market Prospects delivers timely commodity market and outlook information to people in the agricultural sector prior to spring planting. Interviews with leading experts inform producers about changing conditions that will influence production levels and prices of major Saskatchewan crops in the coming year. Analysts also provide specific price forecasts for individual crops.

Dr. Larry Gutek, the Manager of the Crop Business Section of Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF), says the program can be especially valuable to farmers as their businesses become increasingly complex and technical.

"Farming is a challenging occupation. Producers are forced to constantly expand their knowledge base and their understanding of major issues that affect the sustainability of agricultural production and marketing," Gutek said.

"That's where a feature like Market Prospects can be most beneficial, in helping producers stay up-to-date and learning what the leading industry experts are anticipating as they make important decisions for the coming crop year on their farms."

The series is co-ordinated by the Department of Agricultural Economics at the University of Saskatchewan, in co-operation with CTV. The lineup for the remainder of 2007 focuses on many areas of importance to the overall agricultural industry and individual farm operations. Among the topics that will be featured are: the U.S. perspective on various crops; the world oilseed outlook; developments in organic agriculture and marketing challenges; approaches to addressing labour shortages in the industry; agriculture and the environment; CWB crops; pulse crops; canola and flaxseed; special crops such as mustard, canary seed and others; and oats, hulless barley, winter wheat and triticale.

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Market Prospects 2007 receives financial support from the federal Advancing Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Saskatchewan (ACAAFS) program, SAF, the Canadian Wheat Board, the Saskatchewan Canola Development Commission, the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan, and the Saskatchewan Pulse Growers.

It is estimated that more than 75,000 viewers in the province watch the show each week, and it is also available across Canada through satellite television.

Gutek says that producers who want to keep informed on market outlooks and key policy issues in 2007 should be sure to tune in. "There's something for all prairie farmers and anyone else interested in the agricultural industry," he noted.

More information on the program can be obtained on the Market Prospects website at www.marketprospects.usask.ca or by calling the SAF Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377.

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FARM STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM EXPANSION BENEFITS PRODUCERS

The Canada-Saskatchewan Farm Stewardship Program, which provides producers with financial assistance to maintain or improve the quality of soil, water, air and biodiversity, has recently made several additions to its list of "Beneficial Management Practices" eligible for funding. Producers who have completed an Environmental Farm Plan—or those who have been part of an Agri-Environmental Group Plan—are eligible for funding under this program.

The Farm Stewardship Program began in 2005 as a component of the Agricultural Policy Framework. Its objective is to accelerate the adoption of beneficial management practices to create positive environmental changes in farming methods.

A beneficial management practice is defined as one which:

1. ensures the long-term health and sustainability of land-related resources used for agricultural production;
2. benefits the long-term economic and environmental viability of the agriculture industry; and
3. minimizes negative impacts and risk to the environment.

According to Wayne Gosselin, Environmental Policy Specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF), more than 8,500 farm units have attended environmental farm planning workshops over the past two years. As a result, "over 5,000 environmental farm plans were filed, and more than 4,000 projects were approved for funding to the end of 2006," Gosselin said.

The Farm Stewardship Program now provides up to $50,000 of funding, covering 30 to 50 per cent of eligible costs, for approved projects where producers invest in adopting any of the identified beneficial management practices, up from the original $30,000 cost-sharing cap.

Changes to the program that came into effect in November 2006 allow the labour rate for in-kind contributions by producers to increase to $15 per hour.

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Another significant change is the addition of several new beneficial management practices to the program list. Those of most interest include: costs of removing underground fuel storage tanks; removal of the acreage limit for forage establishment on saline or erodible land; inclusion of gang- and shank-mounted on-row packers as an eligible item for conversion to low-disturbance direct seeding; and inclusion of costs for protection of biodiversity, for mapping, and for consulting related to First Nations Traditional Land Use.

Gosselin said, "These are changes that were requested by producers, and have been approved by the national committee," which establishes the approved list of practices for the program.

Producers who are interested in participating in the program, or would like more information, can call the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Client Service Centre at 1-800-667-8567, or check the program information on the SAF website at www.agr.gov.sk.ca/docs/programs_services/APF_environment.asp.

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